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ABSTRACT

Higher education opportunities for women in Botswana were studied through a feminist theoretical framework and a participant conversation methodology. Nine female students, participants in a postgraduate diploma program for secondary teacher certification or a masters program in education, ranged in age from 23 to 49. All but one were first generation college graduates, and all were from a culture that until recently had excluded women from ownership, decision making, and power. The study involved these participants and three researchers, two members of the faculty of education and a visiting Fulbright scholar. The study used an informed conversation method or structured conversations informed by participatory data collection and analysis through interviews, member checks, and a focus group. The researchers and students exchanged life stories. The study provides evidence that these Botswana women realize the extent to which cultural traditions have allowed for the subordination of women to men in Botswana, yet they believe they can counteract that status for themselves. These women clearly articulated their perceptions of the impact of education on their lives, the factors that allowed them this education, the impact of cultural traditions on women's lives, and their possible roles in social change in Botswana. The interview guide and a poem based on the data are attached. (Contains 19 references.) (SLD)

THE IMPACT OF CULTURE, SELF-DETERMINATION, AND ALLIES ON WOMEN'S EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES IN BOTSWANA

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON BOTSWANA AND EDUCATION

Botswana is a landlocked country in southern Africa with an area of 582,000 square miles and a population of 1.5 million. In 1966, after 120 years as a British protectorate, Botswana established independence. With a parliamentary democracy and economic stability, Botswana is one of Africa's fastest growing economies.

According to the United Nations Human Development Report, this semi-desert country has moved from a low human development country to a medium human development country in the 90s. (Human Development Report, 1993). In most developing countries, education is viewed as a key element in the development process. Botswana is no exception in this regard.

Since 1966, the government of Botswana has proposed and implemented some major improvements in the quantity and quality of education (Duncan, 1989). In the past 10 years or so, these efforts have focused on access and equity. Gender issues have moved to the forefront of equity in education issues as well as in other development areas.

Propelled by a global focus on women and development issues, organizations and individuals in Botswana drive efforts to change the conditions and beliefs that sustain biased past practices. Government policy reform, government-sponsored workshops for government and non-government agency employees, and other educational efforts have made an impact on changing gender-biased cultural beliefs. However, reform advocates understand that there is much yet to be done despite continuous government reviews of the educational system.

In 1975, a national commission on education carried out the first comprehensive review of the entire education system. The reported findings in 1977 resulted in the adoption of the National Policy on Education. The most recent commission review of education occurred in 1992-93. The commission produced recommendations, currently guiding Botswana's policy on education and now referred to as the Revised National Policy on Education. As a result of these recommendations, the National Council on Education was established in 1995. This council is charged to implement, monitor, evaluate and recommend the necessary changes in educational policy. (Excellence in Education for the New Millennium Report, 1999)

In 1996, the Presidential Task Group for a Long Term Vision for Botswana was appointed to develop a framework to guide future developments. In its report, the long-term vision for Botswana states that "Education is an investment that will lead to a higher quality of human capacity in the future, and for a better life for everyone. Improvements in the system of education, and the access to education lie at the core of the vision for the future. Education is a form of empowerment". The vision states that "No citizen of the future Botswana must feel or be seen to be disadvantaged as a result of gender, age, religion,

creed, color, national or ethnic origin, location, language or political opinions. The future Botswana will have eradicated negative social attitudes towards the status and role of women, the youth and the elderly." (Presidential Task Group for a Long Term Vision for Botswana, 1997)

The University of Botswana began operation in 1971 with full university status in 1982. In 1991, only 2.4% of men and 2% of women of eligible age gained entrance to the university. Female enrollment at the senior secondary level remained below male enrollment due to cultural beliefs, parental reluctance to spend money on female education, and inadequate female curricular preparation. (Marope, 1994) By 1997, the percentage of males and females attending the university reached parity overall with more women in education, humanities, and social sciences, more than doubling the number of students in six years. (UB Annual Report, 1997)

Bhusumane argues that "... on the low participation of women in vocational and technical training, secondary and tertiary education, and certain traditionally male-dominated careers such as engineering and/or science related fields and politics, there are substantial indications that there is a gradual increase in the number of women in educational institutions and the labor force in Botswana". (Bhusumane, 1993) In 1998, a new policy that required university students to apply for loans from the government, to be repaid after degree completion, was introduced; this policy is currently being implemented. Only those students who are science majors receive free education. Prior to this policy, education at the university was free or partially subsidized by the government.

Students are placed in academic programs based on national needs and past academic record. English is the language of record at the university. The number of citizens, overall, teaching at the university has grown to 46%, with 70% in educational programs and 95% of the student population are Batswana. (UB Annual Report, 1997)

Most teachers below the university level have completed a diploma program in one of a number of teachers colleges or the university, with growing numbers completing a university degree. While a few citizens attend English medium schools, most students at the university have attended local schools taught in Setswana, the national language, until the third level or about 9 years of age when instruction occurs in English.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Through a feminist theoretical framework, we attempted to better understand higher education opportunities for Batswana women via their personal accounts and to base our findings on the collective and individual standpoints that emerged. As feminist researchers, we considered two paired beliefs: there exist both individual and collective standpoints in any area of knowledge and people can learn from others' standpoints. The research plan embraced these beliefs with two specific groups: Batswana female students at the university level and cross-cultural researchers. We believed that the research findings might have broader implications for the empowerment of women.

There were two primary research objectives: One, to detail findings and promote further research on female Batswana higher education opportunities from female students' standpoints and two, to formulate, record, and publish strengths, issues, and challenges of the informed conversation method for the study population, the researchers, and others. This method supports participant conversation--interviews, member checks to reflect on interview transcriptions, and a focus group to discuss perceived interview themes as well as

researcher conversation through planning and periodic data analysis to inform next steps. Both participants and researchers served as members of the interpretive community.

We hoped to add the distinct voices of Batswana women to current research findings, to hear through these women's own words the factors that contributed to their successful completion of a college degree, in a country where few women do so. We believed this method might validate the voices and life experiences of these women for themselves and others and demonstrate individual and collective issues tangentially linked or intertwined with educational opportunities.

Other research has shown that females asked to talk about their experiences and to reflect on their stated views and beliefs of their status within a context, offer females insights into their own thinking and actions thus validating their voices within a larger context (Taylor 1997, Lyons, 1998). We believed that providing Batswana women opportunities to discuss their lives and beliefs, often in conversation with others doing the same, would bring these women new insights into their own lives and the larger community of Batswana women.

DESCRIPTION OF THE SAMPLE

The nine female participants, students in a postgraduate diploma program for secondary teacher certification or a masters program in education, ranged in age from 23 to 49. The five postgraduates were unmarried, two with children. The four graduates were married or widowed with children. All, but one, were first generation college graduates. These women lived within a culture that until recently had excluded women from ownership, decision-making, and power.

Each of the participants, students in Mazile's classes at the time, volunteered for the study. Austin presented the proposed research information to both classes including a study description, objectives, rationale for a qualitative design, and time commitment.

The research interpretive community included the participants and three researchers--two members of the faculty of education, one from Botswana and one from the United States, as well as a Gender Fulbright Scholar in Botswana. The university faculty designed the study as well as collected and analyzed the data at various points. The Fulbright Scholar, Michelle Commeyras, joined the interpretive community during the analysis of the interview transcriptions in preparation for the focus group.

METHODOLOGY

This research study used an informed conversation method: structured conversation informed by participatory data collection and analysis among participants and researchers via interviews, member checks, and a focus group. The study built in a conversation platform among the researchers. At many points during project design, data gathering, and analysis, researchers shared their impression on data gathered to determine next steps, the impact of the methodology on the participants, and the parallel process for them as researchers.

The researchers exchanged life stories including the factors influencing their higher education opportunities as women in different cultural and class backgrounds. Austin gained a cultural and historical perspective of Batswana women's status and needs from attending part of a five week training program on gender capacity-building for government and non-government agency employees.

Researchers formulated an interview guide--areas of investigation and potential interview questions--within a framework of higher education opportunities for females and local research needs on higher education access and opportunities, success, challenges, professional goals, academic support, life as a woman, and self-image and voice from a personal perspective. (Attachment A: Interview Guide)

One researcher served as the primary interviewer with the other present to ask probing questions; the roles then switched for the next interview. Each interview lasted 1-1½ hours. On two occasions, participants switched from English to Setswana for clarity of expression. The researchers discussed each interview transcription for possible clarifying questions during member checks.

Each participant was asked to read a copy of her interview transcription, then meet with the researchers individually for a twenty minute member check to answer questions specific to her interview, modify information, and address the question "What stood out in the text for you as you read it?" Six of the nine women met for this member check. One other handed in an edited transcript.

The three researchers read all interviews for emergent themes, issues and highlights for presentation and further conversation in a participant focus group and shared their insights in a two-hour conversation. They discussed the impact of this process on them as researchers, educators, and women. Commeyras created a data poem from the interview scripts. (Attachment B: Data Poem)

Participants discussed some of those emergent themes in a focus group. Prompted by the data poem, the participants discussed their strength, excitement, and determination as women set amid potentially oppressive cultural traditions then deliberated on sources of gender issue knowledge, marriage, and the value of the process to them individually.

Researchers discussed transcriptions of the focus group to formulate initial reactions, findings, and implications for publication and presentation. Further analysis of data was drawn from transcribed researchers' conversations, interviews, member checks, and focus group conversations.

PROBLEMS

When we first approached Mazile's postgraduate class, many students appeared interested in the study. Of about 90 possible female candidates, only five volunteered. Our research participants felt that many other females were interested in volunteering, but did not due to other students' perceptions, their teacher as interviewer, the anonymity of the findings, and possible sharing of the data with their classmates during class time.

I think the society attaches a little stigma to such things as gender. We have not really accepted it. If they identified with gender people, they are likely to be outcasts. (Daisy)

Two women were uncomfortable with their oral language as seen through the interview transcriptions. The first--an energetic woman involved in many activities of church, family, employment, education, and more--spent her time trying to rewrite her words and had not read her entire interview by the time we met for the member check. The second woman never appeared for her member check appointment, but instead offered us a rewritten transcription with her perceived intended words. Both spoke at length during the interviews taking 1½ hours compared to others taking no longer than an hour. The second appeared very deliberate with her words. In the focus group, she waited to comment, then

asked questions of her peers, questions that might refocus their thinking and possibly clarify the issue. She eventually gave her opinion.

Throughout the study, there were schedules to make and keep. Some women would arrive late or not arrive at all, necessitating rescheduling. As most did not have personal phones due to rural or dorm living, communication was difficult.

Two researchers with different time constraints and demands posed an interesting dilemma. Austin could devote many hours to the research study; this was her primary focus for a semester. She had no other professional or personal demands as she was far from her home. Mazile was a new faculty member with many demands on her time; this study was an added focus to an already complicated professional and personal life. Her sister was running for Parliament; her brother was getting married in their home village three hours from the university (months of preparation); and she taught courses, advised students, and planned national gender training sessions. When Austin returned home, the distance impinged on true collaboration. We would have been best served by face-to-face meetings but had to be content with telecommunications. This presentation opportunity has provided the impetus for the publication of findings.

MAJOR FINDINGS

Impact of culture on women's educational opportunities in Botswana

Interview data

This research study provides evidence that these Batswana women realize the extent to which cultural traditions have allowed for the subordination of women to men--an unequal status--yet appear to believe that they have or can counteract that status for themselves. After speaking at length on educational opportunities in the interview, we asked each woman for her opinion on specific statements about Batswana men and women, the reality of being a women, self-image, and voice. They made general statements about a lack of support from men, a culture that promoted subordination, and an apparent lack of appreciation for educated, intelligent women by men, and defended those assertions with stories from their own and others' lives. All felt extremely excited about being women and showed a good self-image despite all expressing some concern about the attitudes of men towards women and their intelligence and success.

Consistently, each woman described the subordination of women to men, a culture posed between this subordination and equality, the changing political climate, public actions to support women's equality, and a satisfaction with being women in these changing times. They told their own stories--many rife with gender inequities and general views to support subordination. Yet, they overcame the subordination, cultural beliefs, and tradition to feel proud and excited about being women. While all interviews supported these understandings, we have included data selections--short stories--from three women as these stories illustrate a general view with personal connections. At the conclusion of each story, links are drawn to general emergent themes in all stories.

Story 1: Ruth Kadise

Ruth Kadise, a 49 year old master's degree student, works at a teacher's training college. She has four children aged 14 to 21. While she married in 1970, she did not have her first child until she was twenty eight. "I was regarded to be abnormal during our days. It was very late. And probably that is one of the things that made me go through my

education. . . " She is now a widow. She was the oldest of five children, the only female child. Her mother never went to school and her father did only four years of schooling. Her schooling opportunities seem serendipitous.

The most interesting part is how I got my primary, higher primary education that time. During that time, my father did not want me to go to school, secondary school. He kept saying according to our tradition, a lady has to get married. He did not want me to go to school.

She was admitted to secondary school, then a teachers college with the support of others. Her grandfather gave her a cow to sell, a former teacher gave her shoes and clothes, and her father, though claiming he had no money, gave her enough for transport and soap. He provided much more for his four sons to go to school.

Ruth describes the scene today at kgotlas, village meeting places where local affairs are managed.

There is very little freedom today in Botswana. If I may go to a Kgotla today and there is somebody addressing a meeting, even if I raise up my hand, even if I want to say something, it will be men first who will be pointed at. Most of the time you will find that the chairperson will be a man. . . and according to our culture . . . women have to sit down (on the floor) when men are sitting on the chairs. You will sit on the floor even if you bring yourself a chair. You will end up giving it up for the men.

She feels that only educated men may value women's voices. Her experiences in the village affairs shows that men are expected to "say their wife's thoughts" and that women are "not supposed to say anything" especially something that "is true". She sees that "there are so many things in Botswana" that make it difficult to be a woman like buying property and borrowing money. Yet, she too, feels grand about being a woman, especially in terms of taking care of her children.

I feel great that I am a woman and I can take care of my kids the way I want to as compared to men. . . But I think that is what many women take it to be proud of, when one is married she is sort of taken care of. But I think I would prefer to be a woman as compared to be a man. I bring up my kids the way I want them to be, alone. I hope I am doing the best, more than a man would do.

Ruth expressed beliefs reinforced by others. In general, parents favor a son's education. Even today, men's voices are held to be the important ones, controlling all matters in kgotla meetings and even the seats. Men do not appear to value women's voices, in fact speak for their wives or usurp women's thoughts as their own. Women have difficulty borrowing money or buying land, although most of the women were aware of changes here.

Story 2: Phatsimo Mogotsi

Phatsimo Mogotsi is a 24 year old postgraduate diploma student, ready to begin teaching. She is unmarried with a three year old son. Her parents are not highly educated. While she describes support for continued education from her aunts as well as her boyfriend, who has not gone to college, and a brother-in-law, she offers cogent opinions on Botswana men.

They don't like intelligent women because they think that they are taking over their status. At looking at our culture, man has to dominate a woman. And when you are intelligent, they think you are going to dominate them.

When asked if there were a few men who liked intelligent women, she proffered "approximately two percent." She saw her boyfriend as an exception since "He always wants to encourage me to go to school. He doesn't feel that if I get educated, I will threaten him. He is not threatened. We are always trying to discuss it." Yet, she felt that she would not call herself lucky as "you never know when it's going to end."

She feels that with courage, education, and government policy changes, women will be able to be anything they want but perceives underlying cultural barriers.

They (Women) do have so many opportunities for advancement but the hierarchy... doesn't allow women to advance because it's patriarchal where men want to be there and they are dominating. They are blocking women's opportunities and saying that if this woman goes up, she is going to control them and advance other women and then it becomes a women thing.

Phatsimo finds that "it is very exciting to be a woman. She likes being a woman, being herself. She describes marriage as the difficult part of being a woman. This view was expressed by three of the other unmarried women.

You just have to be ruled by that man. Even if you . . . are the bread winner in the family, you always have to conform to the rules of the man. Always respect him that he is the head of this family although you have given him everything that he wants.

Phatsimo expressed a belief reinforced by almost all of the interviewees. Men, in general, do not like intelligent women as they might attempt to dominate the men. She understands that while a hierarchy has existed that has allowed men to dominate, courage, education, and government policy changes will allow women to advance. Most felt this to be true.

Story 3: Daisy Nlebgwa

Daisy Nlebgwa, a 25 year old postgraduate diploma student, earned money by tutoring and teaching to pay expenses. Her mother, a primary school teacher, furthered her education at a teaching center after a divorce. Daisy grew up in an extended family, learning early the impact of divorce on women in Botswana society—a threat to lose property and possessions.

By the time her mother divorced, "She had no power or authority. . . They had two cars. But the cars were sold, mysteriously." Her dad put his assets into another bank account.

So it was just starting from scratch, from zero. And fortunately she got herself a SHAA (Self-Help Housing Agency) plot (a scheme introduced by the government to assist low-income families with housing), . . . and she built herself a house. She started with a small three-room house and bit by bit she kept on expanding it. Even now it is comfortable. I said, ok, fine, this is what marriage is all about. You have to really do something for yourself. You don't have to see yourself as a failure. If you are given the chance to start afresh, use it.

Daisy experienced the impact of divorce on children and the affects of determination and education for success.

You know when the parent divorces, they return to the mother's homestead. So when your mother is a divorcee, you are not given the due respect like other children . . . What you find, my cousins, the uncle's kids are given the due respect. I have to do something about myself. If I don't . . . earn respect here, I have to give it to myself.

Daisy felt that very few Botswana men support equality but educated men, particularly those in law studies, may value intelligent women. She understood first-hand the lack of power to effect reasonable change with a male administrator. Prior to a school staff meeting, Daisy's female peers had supported a meal allowance adjustment to reflect a stated policy. In the meeting, Daisy called the headmaster's attention to the memorandum on meal allowances. He told her to see him later in his office. Her peers offered no verbal support at the meeting.

Daisy was very excited about being a woman, feeling that women are now able to challenge men in all arenas, even religion, and that the changes have allowed women "the opportunity to say whatever they want to say." Daisy feels that while few women are rising to the challenge right now, that will change within ten years. The years of "being submissive, depending upon the husband" are running out "as we are now about to enter the 21st century, which I see as the century of the woman."

Daisy was the only one interviewed who had personally experienced the effects of a mother's divorce yet others raised the issue of women's powerlessness to policies that supported male domination and power. She attempted to make a difference for herself and others in a culture that was changing to allow women a fuller voice and greater rights by challenging men's dominance, excited to be a part of it all.

Focus group data

As researchers, we agreed to read all of the interview transcriptions for perceived major themes and individual stories—the women's collective and individual standpoints—for further analysis as researchers and further advancement in a focus group by the interviewed women. To begin the focus group, one researcher detailed the process and the researchers' own meeting to consider interview responses. She told the women that the researchers had been struck by the power of the women's words and their apparent excitement at being women. One researcher, the Fulbright gender scholar who they met for the first time that day, had composed a data poem with each stanza depicting one of the nine women with words extracted from her interview. Even though each researcher believed the poem resonated firmly with her individual findings of cultural oppression juxtaposed with excitement at being women, we did not offer this interpretation. We asked instead for the women to react to the poem. We hoped, as a group, they would bring their individual beliefs and personal stories to bear on a collective view of both.

Without hesitation, the women discussed culture, oppression, socialization, cultural stereotyping, and change in deep, revealing and intelligent ways spurred by the poem's words. All spoke. At times, some were invited into the conversation. They believed that the oppression of women had been impacted by the socialization within the culture and reinforced both in the family and the schools.

We are socialized . . . to believe that a woman's voice is not valuable in a community . . . only men's voices were valuable compared to women. (Kefilwe)

While stereotyped beliefs on the value and roles of women and men are still prevalent, at least these women felt that they might be affecting a change in that view.

That unlike in the past, here the women are proud of being themselves. . . So they don't see themselves as being under men. They are trying to destroy that myth that men are the leaders,

men are important, men can do everything for the society. Here women see themselves as being important, . . . important to their own society, who can be leaders of the society. (Phatsimo)

These women saw themselves among a group of modern women--strong, independent, and proud. They conjectured that education and/or independence might be central to their own changing beliefs and that this same change among the rural, uneducated may take a long time.

It is still a reading in their (rural women's) minds that women have their place and men have their place, that women have their jobs and men have their jobs. It's going to take a long time to change. (Ouma)

It is difficult for people in the far areas who are, let me say, less educated in the course of reading and writing . . . to understand why we say that we are being oppressed or . . . undermined, exploited by men. (Mmaphefo)

One researcher re-emphasized the marked contrast: despite a restrictive and repressive society, women are emerging as strong, confident, and ambitious. She asked, "Do you have a sense of what it is that has led women to be strong in this culture when they are being told differently?" The women cited three factors in their lives that allowed them to rise above societal expectations or norms for women: family support and expectation for education; a knowledge of national women's issues and efforts including women's movements and changes in the legal system; and female role models who showed strength, determination, and independence or encouraged the same in them.

But in the modern day, even the laws are being changed to protect the women. So I think they also get strength to voice up. (Berlinah)

Comments on family support and female role models (allies) reinforced the interview data included in the findings that follow.

The Impact of Self-determination on Educational Opportunities

These women felt they were successful despite lack of support, in general, from men. They realized a need to be independent, self-reliant, and in control of their own lives and understood the role that education played in achieving that status. All nine women showed at many times in their interviews that they had a deep internal motivation or self-determination to succeed; almost all showed great confidence and independence. All of the postgraduates anticipated master's degrees; two of the master's degree students envisioned doctorates.

The Impact of Allies on Women's Educational Opportunities

Family and other people as allies: support and expectations for education

For the most part, funding university study was not a barrier for these women. Government scholarships paid for each of the postgraduate's university study and two of the masters' degree programs. The other two elected to begin a master's program prior to the expected requisite time and teaching experience needed for further government support. Therefore, they had to pay for their degree program. Based on one's secondary school grades and national need, students are placed in an undergraduate or postgraduate program of study. Some of these women had not selected the teaching field as a first

choice but that was the only option open to them. If they had their own funds, they could have made different choices.

The interview questions on perceived factors affecting educational access, support from others, and personal reasons for further education supported the following conclusions. All of these women felt support from relatives, emotional, financial or both. All but one listed support from others—friends, boy friends, lecturers/teachers, or the minister of education—as an important factor affecting their university education.

All women felt that others expected they should be educated; this supported their own expectation for education. All but one mentioned the general value of an education. All of the younger women, the postgraduates, talked specifically about the plight of the uneducated woman, drawing on their observations of other's life or general perceptions, as motivation for education.

Women allies

All nine females were influenced in significant ways by a woman ally or "othermother" (Collins 1990), named as the person who had made the greatest difference in their life. These women, in general, family or extended family members, guided the woman's actions, inquiries, and growth to allow them to be heard and feel valued. They offered advice, gave support, provided a role model and a source of inspiration, offered suggestions and models for success, encouraged education often finding school opportunities for them, and helped in financial situations.

She (aunt) always tries to put some issues before me and discuss them so I can see how life is. Like about education... 'How do you feel about schooling?' And then I will tell her my things about university. And then she will try to assure me that what I am doing is ok, that in life I will make it like she has. (Phatsimo)

Someone who has tried to support me and even given her life experience, her confidential life experience to give me support, courage, and confidence... She (sister-in-law) really encouraged me to (continue my studies)... And when I had financial problems, too, she would really assist me... (Berlinah)

Eight of these allies were relatives or members of the extended family: Two mothers, one aunt, one grandmother, three sisters, and one sister-in-law. The other woman ally was a teacher although in this case, the participant tells detailed stories about the many people responsible for her education.

Some of the women felt they, too, had a role in helping other females. Most described the special efforts needed to maintain friendships with others not in college. While we had hoped to have them discuss women allies and their own possible roles as allies during the focus groups, there was no time.

OTHER FINDING

The Impact of the Informed Conversation Method

Analysis shows that this informed conversation method supported the validation of voices and conversations of cross-cultural researchers and research participants around important research questions in higher education gender studies. Participants gained entry into research processes and conversations with others on their status as women in a changing society to gain new insights into their strengths and promise as well as to validate their voice as an instrument of influence for other women.

Some of the women discussed the personal impact of this participatory research process. In member checks, each of six women shared their insights on her interview and the transcription. In general, those women believed that talking about their transcribed words and interview themes brought new insights into their life and knowledge, displayed insights into their intelligence and gender issues, showed their ability to articulate opinions, and/or evoked or reinforced a sense of pride in their words or intelligence. The women had continued to think about the issues raised in the interviews.

In the focus group, the women realized that the process had enlightened them in ways that served them personally. They realized they could learn from each other in a conversation on gender issues, they may have a responsibility to sensitize other women, and that unity can promote woman's success.

We are aware of ourselves as women that we can be important to society... we can also sensitize other women... (Phatsimo)

Unity can really make women succeed and understand and maybe change things for the better... (Berlinah)

The process informed the researchers standpoints on women's educational access, their actions as researchers, and insights gained from the interaction with one another. They felt inspired by the women's strength of conviction and gender issue knowledge in the face of subordination and their individual drive to change that. While we expected certain factors would impact educational opportunities, we heard those profiled through these women's own stories, women volunteering to share those stories individually and as a group.

In a two-hour conversation, researchers shared impressions of the women's voices and messages via their interviews. While Mazile felt that the stories reaffirmed her beliefs about Batswana women, she was inspired at these women's willingness to volunteer as well as their strength of conviction in personal and gender-related matters.

It is useful for me to actually hear people's voices. For instance, I know that women are strong, women are becoming aware of gender issues but to hear it said made a difference. (Mazile)

While these stories may represent other educated women, they seem to epitomize that something exciting has begun to happen for women in Botswana.

CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

These women's standpoints depict a changing view and time for Batswana women. These women clearly articulated their perceived impact of education on their lives, the factors that allowed them this education, the impact of cultural traditions on women's lives, the policies and movements to effect change for themselves and others, and their possible role in that change. These Batswana women were determined to succeed, be educated, and be independent despite cultural traditions.

Research with others in Botswana is needed to determine the extent of these convictions among other women and how that might affect large-scale change in women's education in Botswana. As we spoke to nine women who volunteered, the extension of these findings to a larger sample is not known. The findings, however, can provide the motivation for further research and conversations. A follow-up study might conduct similar interviews

with other women and men, then a large-scale survey with questions arising from insights of both groups.

With each delineated factor, the question remains: Which of these factors—self-determination, support and expectations of others, women allies, and an ability to feel good about being women despite traditions that subordinate women to men—are necessary for educational success. As stated in the findings from the focus group, these women in conversation with others, cited three factors in their lives that allowed them to rise above societal expectations or norms for women. Which of these--family support and expectation for education; a knowledge of national women's issues and efforts including women's movements and changes in the legal system; and female role models who showed strength, determination, and independence or encouraged the same in them—are necessary? Perhaps we must assume they are all necessary.

If the power of (women) allies for the psychological, cognitive, and intellectual development of these Batswana women is critical, then further research is necessary to determine the effect of allies on others, including males. Mazile feels that female support is a critical factor for both men and women, that if asked, both men and women would list a woman as the one person who had made a difference in their life.

Making these research results public in arenas for gender attitude change—university classes, women's organizations, gender-capacity training sessions, journals—may allow others to understand the impact of women's support for the success, education, and self-reliance of other women. Other women, as these women, may begin to understand the impact of, and responsibility to support other women's education and independence.

Perhaps there is one untapped resource to allow women to extend, grow, and become exciting, powerful, educated women—that of women's conversation forums. At the beginning of this paper, we stated that "As feminist researchers, we considered two paired beliefs: there exist both individual and collective standpoints in any area of knowledge *and* people can learn from others' standpoints." Clearly these women shared their individual standpoints, embraced their collective standpoints *and* learned from the exchange. This study provided women an opportunity to feel united in purpose, validated, and educated on issues that affected them. While these women spoke on cultural issues and gender matters in the focus group, they also conversed on a connected matter—marriage. They interpreted issues through a gender and personal lens in the safety of other Batswana women like themselves. Perhaps more such opportunities are needed.

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Attachment A: Interview Guide

Research Study: Female University Students' Perceptions of Factors Affecting Their Higher Education Access and Opportunities

1. Perceived factors affecting personal educational access

- Many more women are now entering university study in Botswana. You are among that group. Talk about the factors in your own life that allowed you to be one of those women.
- What, if any, barriers were there for you to enter the university at this point?

2. Support from others

- Support (emotional, psychological, or financial) to enter and continue in university studies can come from others: teachers, faculty, friends, family, peers, partners, and other people, systems, organizations. Describe any of these sources of support you feel has helped you enter or continue in university studies. How has this support been shown?
- How do others (family, friends, partners) feel about your pursuit of higher education?
- How have others, who have not been educated at the level you are now seeking, accepted your own desire for this education? (Family, friends, peers, other women, men)
- Talk about one person who may have made a difference in your life. What did s/he do?
- Speak about your friendships among women.

3. Personal reasons for further education; directions upon completion

- Research studies have shown that women continue their education for many reasons: new employment possibilities, new knowledge, self-image, support for children, further education - university degree or advanced degree. Some often return to the university after some years away. Describe the reasons for your own continued education.
- Why have you chosen this area of study?
- What will you do at the completion of your study?

4. Educational opportunities and truths for women from their view (opinions)

- React to the following statement: Batswana men like Batswana women who are intelligent and take studying seriously.
- React to the following statement: Women have as many opportunities for a university education as men do. (If not, what is the case? Why? What can be done to equalize this?)
- React to the following statement: Women have as many opportunities for advancement in their job as men. (If not, what is the case? And why? What can be done to equalize this?)
- Looking just at the field of education, there are more women concentrated at teaching primary school and fewer in administration (heads of schools). What might change that?
- React to the following: Women can be almost anything they want to be professionally.
- How will you know when you have been successful? How do you measure your success? (Personal reflection? Validation from others (peers, family, teachers))

5. Learning

- What strengths do you have that makes university learning possible for you? (Motivation, good listener, ask questions for clarification, other)
- What challenges do you bring to learning? How do you get better at those things that you see as challenges? How do you meet or overcome the challenges?

- If you need help in your studies, where do you seek it? When do you seek help from teachers? From peers?
- What are those qualities you most like to see in a teacher/professor? Do you see these traits in males and females?
- What behaviors of women, in general, contribute to their success in university learning?

6. On being a woman

- Tell me a story about yourself (or another woman) that shows it is exciting to be a woman. Tell me another story about yourself (or another woman) that shows it might be difficult to be a woman.
- What words would you use to describe women in general? You?
- What responsibilities does being a woman carry with it? What freedoms?

7. On self-image

- Self-image impacts much in a person's life. Describe your own feeling of self.
- What makes you feel important? Valued?
- Sarah Lawrence Lightfoot, a Black American and sociologist at Harvard talked about the gifts of each person. She felt we needed to look at our own gifts more carefully and celebrate who we are. What do you see as your gifts?

8. Voice

- Research has shown that women's voices range from silent to connected and confident. Talk about your own voice and your ability to be heard. Can you be heard when you wish? By whom? What allows your voice to be heard?
- Research has shown in the US, that men and boys talk more in classrooms than women and girls. Do you believe that is true here? Why?
- Do males value women's voices (opinions)? (If no, how do you feel and what do you do?)
- Do you join in class discussions? Early in the discussion? Later after several have spoken? Never unless called on?

9. What message would you give to other women about university education?

Attachment B: Data Poem

Exciting Women

Written by Michelle Commeyras

Batswana men don't like intelligent women.
Phatsimo says, "It is very exciting to be a woman."
I like to be seen as someone who is confident and competent.

Being a woman it means being under a man.
Berlinah says, "I enjoy being a woman."
I am someone who is really proud of myself.

Most men don't value women's voices.
Mmaphefo says, "I think it is exciting to be a woman."
Most of the time, I never feel like I will fail.

Your father keeps saying if you were a boy, he would be happy.
Ruth says, "I feel great that I am a woman."
I am proud and satisfied of what I am.

Males think women's ideas are not relevant.
Daphne says it is "exciting to be a woman."
I have proved myself a woman.

Men value 25% of what women say.
Peggy says, "I am glad I am a woman."
I feel strong about who I am.

The majority of Batswana men want females to be subordinate to them.
Ouma says, "As a woman I am very tolerant."
I am confident, competent, and open-minded.

I think most men in Botswana do not like women who are intelligent.
Kefilwe says, "I don't think it is difficult to be a woman."
I do not want to be dependent.

On rare occasions men value women's voices
Daisy said, "I think it is exciting to be a woman now that things are changing."
I am very confident, educated, intelligent, courageous, bold, and optimistic.



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